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ABSTRACT

Cooperative education and career development practitioners must use marketing to demonstrate to multiethnic students that cooperative education is a viable option for them. A department must be willing to invest time necessary to establish links with multiethnic faculty, staff, and student leaders if it is to create an environment attractive to multiethnic students. Cooperative education staff charged with outreach to multiethnic groups must get involved with students, get to know them, and encourage them to be different and to pursue opportunities that are new. A multiethnic outreach effort with a step-by-step market research and action program is needed. The key factor in effective efforts to reach multiethnic students is the ability to recognize and value the uniqueness of these individuals and to demonstrate positive response to this uniqueness. There are no instant solutions to attracting multiethnic students to participation in cooperative education. Successful marketing efforts require time, creativity, and a trial and error approach. The continued success of college cooperative education programs in the future may will depend on their ability to attract multiethnic populations. (KC)

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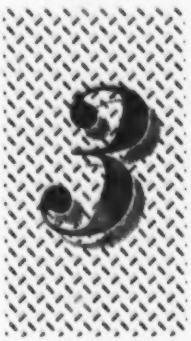

1990

Marketing Cooperative Education Programs to Multi-Ethnic Students

by Linda Bates Parker

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> Cooperative education and career development practitioners must use marketing to reach and to demonstrate to multi-ethnic students that co-op is a viable option for them.

In this paper, the term "multi-ethnic" includes African Americans, Hispanics, Asians, and Native Americans. The term "minority" is offensive to many individuals in these groups, which will soon represent a numerical majority of American Society. This fact should be kept in mind as programs are named and described. The term "multi-ethnic" also is a reminder that there are valuable and significant differences among these groups.

INTRODUCTION

Cooperative Education, the structured combination of academic study and related work experience, is one of the outstanding success stories in American higher education. However, the long proud history of co-op has been primarily a white college student success story. With the exception of historically black institutions and a few others, co-op has failed to attract multi-ethnic students in numbers proportionate to their enrollment.

Cooperative education and career development practitioners must use marketing to reach and to demonstrate to multi-ethnic students that co-op is a viable option for them. These students must be made aware of the challenges in meeting the increasingly high expectations of employers for relevant academic and work experiences. Higher education institutions have a responsibility to insure that multi-ethnic students receive the proper information not only to consider cooperative education as an important work experience option, but also as a real educational asset.

This paper discusses the importance of sensitizing cooperative education program personnel to the needs of multi-ethnic students, and how commitment and effort can lead to the development of a successful multi-ethnic student outreach program for cooperative education.

REASONS FOR CONCERN

The world is changing and the U.S. population is dramatically shifting; one of the biggest changes is the increasing enrollment of African Americans, Latinos, Chicanos, Asians, and other ethnic populations in U.S. colleges. During 1984-1986, multi-ethnic enrollment in public colleges and universities increased; Hispanics showed the greatest gains followed by Asians. African American enrollment declined during this same period. Multi-ethnic groups increased their share of enrollment in public colleges and universities from 17.9% in 1984 to 19% in 1986 (Hands On Minority Recruitment, 1989).

In 1987, 3.6 million children entered first grade and will graduate in the year 2000. One-third of these students are non-white and because these multi-ethnic groups are increasing in the population, it is expected that their college enrollment will continue to increase over the next decade (Hands On Minority Recruitment, 1989).

These changing demographics require changes in co-op recruitment practices, if co-op is to continue to fulfill current institutional and corporate commitments to recruitment and retention of multi-ethnic students. However, the unequal distribution of these students across academic disciplines poses real problems in terms of multi-ethnic outreach efforts.

The task will be discovering how to make co-op opportunities real and attractive to multi-ethnic students. These students come to campus with unique interests and goals, but with limited exposure to U.S. businesses and to cooperative education programs. In order to attract these new populations, co-op must develop new strategies and marketing techniques.

Cooperative education professionals are accustomed to the co-op program selling itself but, marketing cooperative education programs to multi-ethnic students is complicated. African American, Mexican American and other ethnic students do not arrive on campus with strong beliefs in or awareness of the benefits of co-op. Cooperative Education must be marketed as a new product to these students.

The benefits of participation in co-op have to be understood in terms of their actual benefit to multi-ethnic students. These students may not only be unfamiliar with the concept of cooperative education, but also may be more aware of its disadvantage in extending the time to complete a degree than its advantages in career exploration and development, cognitive and personal development, and financial assistance. Co-op is not a topic at the multi-ethnic dinner table or social hour. Many of these students are the first or second generation in their families to attend college. Their goals may be to get in and out of college as quickly as possible, and this doesn't include an extra year or two of experiential learning. College is seen as a route to survival, economic opportunity, and the advancement of their status; co-op is not easily or automatically seen as a realistic option.

The financial drive to complete college in four years is compelling and must be addressed head-on to alter some multi-ethnic family responses to co-op. This concern about time and money is extremely important if co-op practitioners hope to market their programs effectively to multi-ethnic students. It requires re-thinking strategies, understanding the perspective of multi-ethnic students and their families, and then committing extra effort and creativity. Effectively reaching these students requires new program initiatives and a broadening of departmental focus and activity. The first task is increased staff awareness and sensitivity.

SENSITIZING COOPERATIVE EDUCATION AND CAREER SERVICE STAFFS

Good intentions are not enough. Cooperative education practitioners and career service professionals cannot be effective in reaching culturally diverse groups just on the basis of their good intentions. A department must be willing to invest time necessary to establish links with multi-ethnic faculty, staff and student leaders, if it is to create an environment attractive to multi-ethnic students. The department head must also emphasize the total commitment of the department to this project. The lack of visible multi-ethnic representation in the co-op or career service office can also affect the strength and credibility of a department's outreach effort.

This assignment does not necessarily have to go to the one non-white staff member, unless that individual truly has a strong desire to serve in this capacity. The outreach function must be assigned to an informed, energetic, racially and culturally astute staff member. The person must be deeply interested in and knowledgeable about the lifestyles and aspirations of ethnic students. The assigned individual must be visible to multi-ethnic students and must be involved in their activities, programs and services.

A review of the literature indicates that student "involvement" is key to student success, therefore, the co-op practitioner must also involve multi-ethnic students in outreach activities sponsored by the co-op office, with the active support of the entire department. Involvement will benefit multi-ethnic students only in an atmosphere where their contributions are valued and their ability to meet high standards is accorded genuine respect (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 1987). "When an institution knows itself and its students, it can create a climate of cooperation, respect, and appreciation for the student, the community, and itself. Without good lines of communication, however, none of this will be possible"(Lehman, 1987).

The best outreach efforts can be destroyed by an insensitive staff member, whether a faculty coordinator, student assistant, or director, who fails to understand or demonstrate a belief in the importance of a multi-ethnic outreach program. Some co-op and career service personnel do multi-ethnic outreach begrudgingly. Some want no part of dealing with those who are different. Some do not want to devote the time necessary to attract new students to co-op. Multi-ethnic students are the first to detect an insincere effort; they easily sense just how welcome they are in the co-op or career service office. Staff who are impatient with the multi-ethnic student's language differences or lack of familiarity with the established system, staff who give preferential treatment to student "regulars", or staff who resent "special" programs all need extensive orientation, training and encouragement to change. Without orientation, training and encouragement, staff attitudes will undermine and destroy the genuine efforts of others.

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FOCUSING ON STUDENT NEEDS

Multi-ethnic students frequently lack sufficient knowledge about business and technical careers. The reasons are diverse: lack of multi-ethnic representation or role models in these areas; a lack of enthusiasm or interest in these fields; or a lack of information about options. These students often do not actively seek new information outside the multi-ethnic student grapevine.

But this lack of enthusiasm for learning about the co-op experience should not be mistaken for a lack of ambition. These students have a strong drive to succeed, they simply lack the necessary information. Co-op staff charged with outreach to multi-ethnic groups must get involved with students, get to know them and encourage them to be different and to pursue opportunities that are new. "It often requires nurturing, tutoring, mentoring, modeling and perpetual encouragement from others as well as a resource bank of successful role models with whom they can identify and emulate" (Wynn, 1989). The efforts to sell co-op to this constituency requires extensive involvement with successful ethnic role models who can encourage, motivate and challenge their younger "brothers and sisters," as well as to educate parents, extended families and the community about the benefits of co-op.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT OF A MULTI-ETHNIC OUTREACH PROGRAM FOR CO-OP

Outreach programs for multi-ethnic groups can be effective if care, sensitivity to the students, and commitment on the part of the staff, faculty, and the college or university is apparent from the beginning. The following are important steps in the development of an outreach program to multi-ethnic students.

- Assign a specific individual to be responsible for the design and implementation of the outreach project. While one person may be assigned overall coordination, the project must always be a total department effort that involves everyone in some aspect of its implementation. It is important that everyone develop multi-ethnic skills and sensitivity.
- Create a task force charged with the responsibility to assist the assigned staff member with outreach planning and implementation activities. It should include multi-ethnic students, professional co-op staff, and staff from the offices of admissions, minority affairs, and financial aid. (Students are an excellent source, of first hand information about the type of support systems they need.)

MARKET RESEARCH AND STRATEGY

- Define the multi-ethnic market that you want to target (i.e., freshman, sophomores, juniors or seniors). Which group of students can benefit immediately from the outreach? Planned activities should be available to all multi-ethnic students regardless of their year in school. Upperclass students including graduating seniors can benefit from these structured support programs.
- Concentrate on co-op programs that are optional for students in specific colleges such as business or arts & sciences. Don't be too ambitious, too quickly.
- Charge the assigned staff person to develop a detailed outreach/marketing plan that sets long-term and short-term goals, objectives, and specific activities.
- Determine the time needed to accomplish goals, set target dates for implementation, in addition to negotiating a realistic budget for activities.
- Create an evaluation process for the program and give staff flexibility to reorder goals and timetables after initial efforts are tested. The evaluation process should involve students, members of the task force and other appropriate staff.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTION PROGRAMS

• Ask the registrar's office for a listing of the targeted market of multi-ethnic students and their parents' names and addresses. Parents and the extended family are influential in the lives of many multi-ethnic students. If parents have a clear understanding of co-op's purposes, objectives and benefits, they can be supportive of the activities directed to their sons and daughters.

• Generate an alumni resource list of multi-ethnic graduates who successfully participated in co-op. These alums can offer valuable perspectives on structuring relevant programs as well as in developing targeted marketing strategies.

• Design and distribute a quality promotional brochure aimed at parents. This brochure should address myths and misinformation about cooperative education and answer specific questions parents have about the benefits of co-op.

• Design and distribute a quality promotional brochure for multi-ethnic students. This brochure should portray successful multi-ethnic students in the program as well as recent graduates.

• Develop an on-going communication system with targeted students who are potential candidates for the program, in order to keep them informed and interested in co-op (newsletter, flyers, postcard campaign, etc).

• Correspond with students on an on-going basis by sending out a quarterly "CO-OP HOTLINE" flyer highlighting co-op students currently involved in the program, the types of co-op positions available, employer comments about the value of the program, and other concrete information.

• Plan regular informational meetings with multi-ethnic students such as a monthly series of career workshops. Selected topics might include career exploration, decision making, and co-op. Videotape these workshops and take them out to show other students.

• Develop a working relationship with the staff in the admissions office and specifically with staff responsible for multi-ethnic recruitment. Familiarize admissions staff with the co-op program and supply them with promotional brochures geared toward the recruitment of multi-ethnic students.

• Provide in-coming students with program "informational flyers" to acquaint them with co-op. As soon as students are accepted into an academic program, send a welcome letter inviting them to learn about and consider the co-op program. Stress the viability of co-op as a way to gain practical work experience in preparation for the world of work. Highlight co-op office open houses and other events.

• Work very closely with the office of career planning and placement and other student services units to assure that the multi-ethnic students that they come in contact with are aware of the benefits of co-op. Co-op staff should collaborate with academic departments on ventures designed to attract multi-ethnic student populations to co-op.

• Participate in other campus wide multi-ethnic programs to heighten co-op's visibility. (i.e. career fairs, dorm meetings, sorority and fraternity meetings, classroom presentations, community career days, etc.).

• Use off-campus resources to publicize outreach activities. Send information about programs to publications such as *Hispanic Engineer* and *Black Collegian Magazine*, place public service announcements on local radio and TV shows, place information in the publications of professional organizations such as National Black Journalists. Don't overlook campus publications, such as the student newspaper and student organization newsletters to spread news about the co-op program.

SUMMARY

The key factor in effective efforts to reach multi-ethnic students is the ability to recognize and value the uniqueness of these individuals and to demonstrate positive responsiveness to this uniqueness. There are no instant solutions to attracting multi-ethnic students to participation in co-op. Successful efforts require time, creativity, and sometimes a trial and error approach to designing marketing activities. Successful marketing efforts will require a willingness and a commitment

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to new ideas. "Success comes not just from the nature of the strategy, but from the quality and the pervasiveness of the commitment" (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 1987).

The success that college co-op has earned in over 80 years is certainly a solid foundation to build on. However, the continued success of college cooperative education programs in the 21st century may well depend on their ability to attract multi-ethnic populations. It is important to continue to keep those creative juices flowing and to try a variety of different marketing ideas. When ideas, procedures, and techniques become stale or obsolete, so does your co-op program.

"Success comes not just from the nature of the strategy, but from the quality and the pervasiveness of the commitment."

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Linda Bates Parker is Director of Career Development and Placement at the University of Cincinnati and President of Black Career Women, Inc.

Ms. Bates Parker's career has been varied, both in corporate and educational settings. Throughout her career she has focused on career opportunities for Black women. It was through her own experiences of being "the first" in so many endeavors that she felt and recognized a need to provide a support group for achieving Black women. With a small nucleus of other Black women who felt as she did, Black Career Women, Inc. (BCW) was founded. Today, BCW conducts workshops across the country and abroad.

As Director of Career Development at U.C., Ms. Bates Parker has administrative responsibility for all staff, campus services, programs and activities related to the career development needs of more than 30,000 students. She came to the Director's position from the Division of Student Affairs where she was Associate Vice Provost. Previously she was Associate Director of Career Development and Placement. Prior to her U.C. affiliation, Ms. Bates Parker was the first Black woman hired in Market Research for The Proctor and Gamble Company. Ms. Bates Parker completed her undergraduate work at the University of Dayton and her graduate work at the University of Cincinnati.

ANN E. KEELING

Ann E. Keeling is the Assistant Dean/Professor in the Division of Professional Practice at the University of Cincinnati in Cincinnati, Ohio. Ms. Keeling is beginning her eighteenth year in cooperative education. As of September 1989, her responsibilities include developing new initiatives to attract more African Americans into designated optional co-op programs. Additionally, she devotes substantial time to administrative duties which include supervising employer development and relations; faculty recruitment and training; faculty and employer standards; summer orientation and new program development. She serves as the Affirmative Action Coordinator for the division, and reviews and approves all government cooperative education agreements between the university and federal agencies.

Ms. Keeling is very active in a number of professional organizations and has held three Vice-President positions in the Cooperative Education Association, Inc. She serves on the Executive Board of Black Career Women, a career development organization based in Cincinnati. She has served as a consultant for Cooperative Education and Humanities Grant Programs.

Ms. Keeling's educational background includes a bachelors degree from Norfolk State University, a masters degree from Yeshiva University, and dual specialist certificates from Yeshiva University.

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